

In 2017, Bangladesh made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government extended its Child Labor National Plan of Action through 2021. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments also provided comprehensive training to a majority of labor inspectors, and institutionalized the use of a factory inspection checklist that includes child labor components. However, children in Bangladesh engage in the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of garments and leather goods. In addition, the labor law does not prohibit children from working in informal economic sectors, and does not specify the activities and number of hours per week of light work that are permitted for children ages 12 and 13. Moreover, the number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, and fines are inadequate to deter child labor law violations.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Bangladesh engage in the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. (1; 2) Children also perform dangerous tasks in production of garments and leather goods. (3; 4; 5; 6; 7) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bangladesh.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	4.3 (1,326,411)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	89.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	1.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		98.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (8)

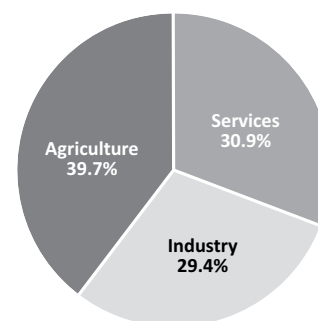
Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Labour Force Survey, 2013. (9)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including harvesting and processing crops, including tobacco, raising poultry, grazing cattle, gathering honey, and harvesting tea leaves (10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15)
	Drying and processing fish, fishing (16; 13; 10; 14; 15; 1)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (17; 18; 15)
Industry	Quarrying and mining, including salt (10; 19)
	Producing garments, textiles, jute textiles, leather,† leather goods, footwear,† and imitation jewelry† (7; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 5; 6) (27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 13; 4; 32; 15; 33)

**Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14**



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**Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Industry	Manufacturing bricks,† glass,† hand-rolled cigarettes ( <i>bidis</i> ),† matches,† soap,† furniture (steel),† aluminum products,† metal products, plastic products,† and melamine products (2; 34; 28; 10; 35; 13; 36; 37; 38)
	Ship breaking (39; 40; 41; 37)
	Welding,† construction,† and breaking bricks† and stones† (18; 10; 16; 42; 14)
Services	Domestic work (43; 44; 45; 3; 46; 14; 15)
	Working in transportation, pulling rickshaws, and street work, including garbage picking, recycling,† vending, begging, and shoe repairing (10; 47; 16; 48; 14; 15; 37)
	Working in hotels, restaurants, bakeries,† and retail and grocery shops (16; 13; 28; 10; 14; 37)
	Repairing automobiles† (47; 30; 49)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks (50; 1; 51; 42; 13; 52; 15)
	Forced begging (51; 16)
	Use in illicit activities, including smuggling and selling drugs (13; 16; 53)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (54; 51; 55; 15)
	Forced domestic work (13; 56; 51; 14; 15)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Many children in Bangladesh engage in dangerous work in the informal manufacturing sector. (3; 4; 5; 6) Children working in informal garment production work as many as 16 hours a day and often carry heavy loads, use hazardous machinery, and handle chemicals without protective equipment. (7; 33) Children employed in tanneries similarly lack protective equipment and experience continuous exposure to heavy metals, formaldehyde, and other hazardous chemicals. (4; 5) In addition, some children in Bangladesh work under forced labor conditions in the dried fish sector and in the production of bricks to help pay off family debts to local moneylenders. (1; 2)

Since August 2017, the Burmese military has engaged in continued violence and acts of ethnic cleansing, resulting in more than 700,000 members of the Rohingya ethnic minority fleeing from Burma to Bangladesh. (57; 58) Nearly 400,000 of those displaced are children, some of whom are subjected to trafficking and labor exploitation in Bangladesh. (14; 57; 59; 60) There are reports that Rohingya children are exploited in bonded labor in the fish drying industry, predominantly found in the city of Cox’s Bazar, while some Rohingya boys work on farms, in construction, or on fishing boats. (52; 14; 60; 58) Girls typically work in domestic service, in the homes of Bangladeshi families living up to 150 kilometers from the Rohingya refugee camps. (52; 61; 62; 63; 64; 65; 60; 58; 66) Research found that some young girls who were promised jobs in domestic service were instead forced into commercial sexual exploitation. (60; 58; 66)

According to the National Education Policy, education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh through eighth grade (age 14). However, several factors contribute to children not attending school, such as inadequate access to water and sanitation facilities and the costs associated with education, including books and uniforms. (10; 67) In addition, due to their lack of documentation, Rohingya refugee children are not permitted to attend school in Bangladesh. The government has permitted UNHCR to provide some limited, basic education services to Rohingya. (15; 63)



## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (cont)**

Convention	Ratification
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Bangladesh's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor, including the minimum age for work.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Section 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (68)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (68)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (68; 69)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370 and 374 of the Penal Code; Sections 3, 6, and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (70; 71)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (71; 72)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 372 and 373 of the Penal Code; Sections 78 and 80 of the Children's Act; Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 8 of the Pornography Control Act (70; 73; 71; 74)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 79 of the Children's Act (73)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	No		
Non-state	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	10	Section 2 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (75)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (76)

\* No conscription (77)

In January 2017, the government publicly acknowledged that trafficking in persons is a problem in the country and published the implementing rules for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act. (78)

There continue to be several gaps in child labor laws and regulations. The Bangladesh Labor Act does not cover the informal economic sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, including domestic work, street work, and work on small agricultural farms with fewer than five employees. (68; 79) Also, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover garment production and fish drying; both are areas of work in which there is evidence that children work in unsafe and unhealthy environments for long periods of time. (69) While the labor law stipulates that children older than 12 may engage in light work that does not endanger their health or interfere with their education, the law does not specify the activities or the number of hours per week that light work is permitted. (68)

In addition, the use of children in pornographic performances and in the production of drugs is not criminally prohibited. (71; 80; 73) There are no published laws setting the minimum age of recruitment at 16 and setting safeguards to ensure that children under

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18 who join the state armed forces do so voluntarily. The legal framework also does not prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. (81)

Although the 2010 National Education Policy raised the age of compulsory education from fifth grade (age 10) through eighth grade (age 14), the new compulsory education age is not enforceable until the legal framework is amended to reflect the revised policy. (82; 18) The Education Act, which was drafted in 2016, will make education compulsory through eighth grade (age 14) and bring Bangladesh into compliance with international standards. (67) However, research did not find evidence that the Education Act was passed during the reporting period.

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments	Enforce labor laws, including those relating to child labor and hazardous child labor. (83)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (84) In the case of the Trafficking in Persons Monitoring Cell, investigate cases of human trafficking and enforce anti-trafficking provisions of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act. (85)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecute labor law violations, including those related to child labor, and impose fines or sanctions against employers. (86)
Child Protection Networks	Respond to violations against children, including child labor. Comprises officials from various agencies with mandates to protect children, prosecute violations, monitor interventions, and develop referral mechanisms at the district and sub-district levels between law enforcement and social welfare services. (16)

#### *Labor Law Enforcement*

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including human resource allocation.

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$3.9 million (83)	Unknown (15)
Number of Labor Inspectors	267 (83)	317 (15)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (86)	No (86)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (87)	Yes (15)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (87)	Yes (15)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	30,421 (83)	32,924 <sup>†</sup> (15)
Number Conducted at Worksites	30,421 (83)	Unknown (15)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	45 (83)	100 (15)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	0 (83)	Unknown (15)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed That were Collected	0 (83)	Unknown (15)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (83)	Yes (15)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (83)	Yes (15)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (83)	Yes (15)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (87)	Yes (15)

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (83)	Yes (15)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (83)	No (83)

† Data are from June 2016 to July 2017.

In 2017, DIFE hired 45 additional labor inspectors. In addition, DIFE directed labor inspectors to utilize a factory inspection checklist and standard operating procedures, which include child labor-specific components. (88) In May 2017, 239 labor inspectors completed a 40-day, comprehensive labor inspection training program. (15)

However, the number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, which includes over 83 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Bangladesh would employ roughly 2,090 labor inspectors. (89; 90; 91) Reports indicate that inspections rarely occur at unregistered factories and establishments, where children are more likely to be employed. (17; 67; 92) In addition, the current penalty for a child labor law violation, a \$63 fine, is an ineffective deterrent. (92; 16)

### *Criminal Law Enforcement*

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including financial resources.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown (15)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (93)	Yes (78)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (15)
Number of Violations Found	5 (93)	Unknown (15)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown (15)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown (15)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (85)	Yes (15)

During the reporting period, law enforcement officials received training from the Ministry of Home Affairs, in coordination with IOM, UNICEF, UNODC, and USAID. (78) The government reported that in 2017 it initiated 717 investigations related to forced labor or sex trafficking. The government identified 702 victims of human trafficking, of which 115 were children. (78) However, the Trafficking in Persons Monitoring Cell reportedly lacked the necessary funds and staff to sufficiently address cases of child trafficking. (94) In addition, reporting indicates that, 3 years after their launch, the Child Protection Networks, intended to be a referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services, are not operating due to a lack of funds. (95)

## **IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR**

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor**

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
National Child Labor Welfare Council	Coordinate efforts undertaken by the government to guide, coordinate, and monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor. (96) Chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Employment, comprises officials representing relevant government ministries, international organizations, child advocacy groups, and employer and worker organizations. (97)

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**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor (cont)**

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
Counter-Trafficking National Coordination Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)	Coordinate the work of government agencies and international and local NGOs on international and domestic human trafficking, including child trafficking, through bimonthly meetings. (85) Oversee district counter-trafficking committees, which manage counter-trafficking committees for sub-districts and smaller administrative units. (85; 98; 99)
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force, MHA	Coordinate Bangladesh and India efforts to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking, particularly children. Liaise with various ministries, government departments, NGOs, and international organizations that assist trafficked children. (98; 100)

Research was unable to determine whether the coordinating bodies were active during the reporting period.

## V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant policies.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor‡**

Policy	Description
Child Labor National Plan of Action (2012–2021)	Identifies strategies for developing institutional capacity, increasing access to education and health services, raising social awareness, strengthening law enforcement, and creating prevention and reintegration programs. (101) In 2017, the plan was extended through 2021. (15)
Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy	Sets the minimum age for domestic work at 14 years; however, children between ages 12 and 13 can work as domestic workers with parental permission. (102) However, the policy is not legally enforceable. (103)
National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking (2015–2017)	Establishes goals to meet international standards and best practices for anti-human-trafficking initiatives, including prevention of human trafficking; protection and legal justice for victims of human trafficking; development of advocacy networks; and establishment of an effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism. (85)
National Education Policy	Specifies the government's education policy, including pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and technical, higher, and non-formal education policies. Sets the compulsory age for free education through eighth grade (age 14). (82)
Seventh Five Year Plan (2016–2020)	Includes the elimination of the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child domestic workers and other vulnerable groups. Sets out actions to be taken by the government, including forming a policy for children working in the formal sector, providing assistance to street children to protect them from exploitation, coordinating the government and other stakeholders for effective rehabilitation, increased working children's access to formal and non-formal learning, and provision of livelihood support to poor households with children. (104) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Seventh Five Year Plan during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (105)

In November 2017, the government made a pledge at the Argentina Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labor to eliminate hazardous child labor by 2021, and all forms of child labor by 2025. The government stated its intention to achieve this goal by strengthening the legal framework, implementing targeted social programs, and jointly conducting awareness raising activities with employers, workers, and civil society stakeholders. (106) However, the government has yet to include child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy. (82)

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including addressing the scope of the problem.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor‡**

Program	Description
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce (CLEAR) Child Labor Project	USDOL-funded, capacity-building project implemented by the ILO in 11 countries to build the capacity of local and national governments to address child labor. In 2017, the ILO, with implementing partner Eco Social Development, launched the child labor monitoring system pilot program in five upazilas in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts. (88; 107) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.



**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor‡ (cont)**

Program	Description
Reaching Out-of-School Children II (2012–2017)	\$130 million World Bank-funded, 6-year program that provides out-of-school children with non-formal education, school stipends, free books, and school uniforms. Helps students attend learning centers called Ananda Schools until the students are ready to join mainstream secondary schools. (108) Over the course of the project, provided education to 690,000 poor children in 20,400 learning centers. (109)
Enabling Environment for Child Rights†	Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs program, supported by UNICEF, rehabilitates street children engaged in risky work by withdrawing them from child labor and enrolling them in school. Supports 16,000 children in 20 districts through cash transfers. (110; 111) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this program during the reporting period.
Child Help Line 1098†	Ministry of Social Work-implemented and UNICEF-supported 24-hour emergency telephone line. Connects children vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation with social protection services. (112) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this program during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (87; 13)

Although the government has implemented child protection and non-formal education programs, research found that the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the child labor problem. In addition, research found no evidence that the government has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children working in tanneries or the informal garment sector. (33)

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Bangladesh (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2013 – 2017
	Extend the law’s minimum age protections to children working in the informal sector, including in domestic work, on the streets, and in small-scale agriculture.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, in particular by including garment production and fish drying.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the law specifies the activities and the number of hours per week that children ages 12 and 13 are permitted to perform light work.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits all offenses related to the sexual exploitation of children for pornographic performances.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, particularly in the production of drugs.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the law establishes 16 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment by the state military with safeguards for voluntariness.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the legal framework reflects the policy that education is compulsory through eighth grade and is consistent with the minimum age for work.	2012 – 2017
Enforcement	Ensure enforcement of citations and penalties for labor law violations, including authorizing the inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor law violations and increasing penalties for child labor law violations to be an effective deterrent.	2014 – 2017
	Create mechanisms for labor law enforcement to refer children involved in child labor to appropriate legal and social services.	2013 – 2017
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO’s technical advice.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted with sufficient frequency at unregistered factories and small businesses.	2013 – 2017

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**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont)**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Publish information relating to labor law enforcement, including the amount of labor inspectorate funding, number of labor inspections conducted at a worksite, number of violations for which penalties were imposed and the number of penalties imposed that were collected.	2012 – 2017
	Publish information on the enforcement of laws on the worst forms of child labor, including the number of investigations, the number of prosecutions, and the number of convictions.	2012 – 2017
	Provide police with sufficient resources and training to enforce violations involving human trafficking, forced labor, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2014 – 2017
	Ensure that Child Protection Networks are adequately funded to provide a functional referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services.	2016 – 2017
Coordination	Publish information on activities undertaken by coordinating bodies.	2017
Government Policies	Publish information on activities undertaken to implement the Seventh Five Year Plan.	2017
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.	2014 – 2017
Social Programs	Implement programs that seek to address inadequate access to water and sanitation facilities and prohibitive fees associated with education.	2013 – 2017
	Provide sufficient education services for Rohingya refugee children and ensure lack of documentation is not a barrier to their school attendance.	2017
	Publish information on activities undertaken to implement social programs, including Enabling Environment for Child Rights and Child Help Line 1098.	2017
	Expand programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, including developing and implementing programs to address child labor in tanneries and the informal garment industry.	2016 – 2017

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